

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3213

April 22, 2009

The Honorable John Murtha
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense

The Honorable C.W. "Bill" Young
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Defense

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

As you begin developing the United States Department of Defense budget for FY10 we are writing in strong support of Secretary Gates' recommendation to increase funding for "wounded, ill and injured, traumatic brain injury, and psychological health programs" in the FY10 defense budget. As the prevalence of suicide amongst service men and women has rapidly been increasing through the years, with 2008 reporting the highest level of army suicide within the military since 1980, we firmly stand by Secretary Gate's efforts to aggressively address and combat this dreadful trend.

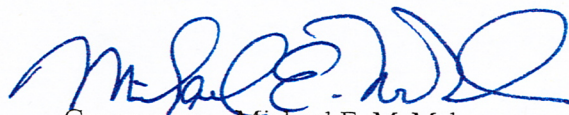
The previous statistics prove the military's dire need to overcome its dangerous shortage of mental health professionals. Secretary Gates' recommendation to increase overall spending to fund these efforts by \$300 million can create incentives for mental health professional to join and stay in the military. This increase in funding can also serve to make mental healthcare more accessible and inevitably, reduce the stigma behind seeking help for mental injuries while in the military.

We firmly believe that every soldier being discharged from the battle fields of Iraq and Afghanistan should have an exit interview with a licensed mental health professional. But, at this time, it is crucial that our service men and women who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan come home and get the care and benefits they have duly earned. In fact, President Barack Obama's recent announcement to advance VA funding and overhaul the transition process from military to VA echoes this call and complements Secretary Gates' suggestions to spend over \$47 billion on healthcare in FY10.

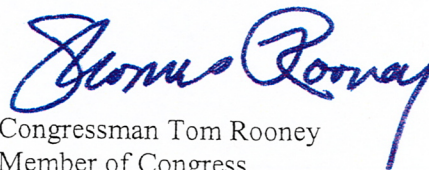
Once again, we firmly support Secretary Gates' funding priorities to fight the phenomenon of military suicides that will inevitably grow if not dealt with immediately. We urge you to fully fund Secretary Gates' request to increase overall funding for mental health programs by \$300 million in the FY10 defense budget.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and welcome the opportunity to work with you to innovate, develop and support these initiatives in FY 10 and for years to come.

Sincerely,



Congressman Michael E. McMahon
Member of Congress



Congressman Tom Rooney
Member of Congress